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The Ratsnake of the Bay Islands, Honduras

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A specimen of *Elaphe flavirufa* (Cope) was secured by Dr. George Franklin Gaumer on Isla Ruatan of the Islas de la Bahia, Honduras, presented by F. D. Godman to the British Museum, and cataloged in that collection in 1893. It was first reported by Gunther in 1894 (1894: 115), and later in the same year by Boulenger (1894: 39). It seems not to have been mentioned since then. Barbour (1928) does not mention it in his brief list of Bay Islands snakes, nor does Dowling (1952) note it in his review of *E. flavirufa*.

Through the courtesy of Dr. A. G. C. Grandison and Mr. A. F. Stimson, we have had the privilege of examining the specimen which, like numerous other examples of the Bay Islands herpetofauna, resembles but differs from a related mainland taxon. We here name it as follows.

Elaphe flavirufa polysticha subsp. nov.

Holotype. Brit. Mus. Nat. Hist. 93.4.26.5, from Isla Ruatán, Islas de la Bahia, Honduras, collected by Dr. G. F. Gaumer. No other specimen known.

Diagnosis and Definition. Like *E. flavirufa pardalina*, having a divided preocular and more than 260 ventrals (264), but differing from that race in having a maximum of 34 (mostly 33) scale rows, and a posterior minimum of 23 scale rows.

Description of holotype. A subadult male, somewhat soft, slightly faded, 595 mm. total length, tail 124 mm. Head scales normal, nasal completely divided; loreal about one third longer than high, contacting two labials (2-3); two preoculars, upper contacting frontal (less than 1 mm.) and narrowly separated (0.5 mm.) from nasal, lower contacting two labials (3-4); two postoculars, lower smaller, contacting 6th labial; three temporals contacting postoculars; 9-9 supralabials, three (4,5,6) entering orbit; 13-13 infralabials; posterior chin shields separated from each other by a minimum of three scales.

Median dorsal scale rows keeled, 7 on each side smooth on rear quarter of body, 13 in area with maximum number of rows, all smooth on anterior quarter of body; a maximum of 9 scale rows keeled; three gulars

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(anterior ventrals of less than full width) ; 33-34 maximum scale rows for a length of 43 ventrals (99-142) ; 34 scale rows for the length on only one ventral (100) ; 23 scale rows posteriorly; usually 5th-9th scale rows adding or dropping, more commonly higher rows anteriorly, lower rows posteriorly; 263 ventrals; scale row formula $31(9) / -8=30(10) / -15=29(53) / +7=30(60) / +8=31(61) / +8=32(95) / +8=33(99) / +9=34(100) / -8=33(101) / -7=32(143) / -6-6=30(146) / -7=29(152) / -5=28(161) / -8=27(163) / -5=26(173) / -5=25(174) / -5=24(209) / -4=23(223) / (263)$; two apical pits; caudals 115, paired; anal divided.

A few scattered, very small dark spots on top of head; body with a series of dark-edged, light-centered blotches, most split medially and staggered, with fused ends, producing a zigzag pattern very similar to that shown by Dowling (1952: pl. 1, figs. a, d) for *E. f. flavirufa* and *E. f. pardalina*; median spots not extending below scale row 8 at midbody, 6 at rear ; smaller lateral spots alternating with dorsal spots, not reaching ventral scales; irregular small dark spots on lower two scale rows and edges of ventrals, some alternating with lateral spots, others even with them.

Comparisons. The only distinctive feature of the Ruatán specimen, so far as we are aware, is its high number of scale rows; no other specimen of the species *E. flavirufa* recorded by Dowling has a maximum exceeding 31, and all other *E. f. pardalina* have 21 scale rows posteriorly. The insular population is certainly closely related to *E. f. pardalina*, having the same distinctive feature of a divided preocular and ventrals in excess of 260. It remains to be seen whether the specimen at hand is representative of the insular population or is aberrant. The high degree of endemism evident in the herpetofauna of the Bay Islands leads us to predict that the present specimen is not aberrant.

The name *polysticha* is from the Greek words meaning "many rows", used in reference to the distinctively numerous scale rows.

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